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65

DIGITAL
EDITION

SPAWN



Todd McFarlane &
Image Comics presents...

THE PAST

Dedicated to
Chris Albrecht



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Spawn N°64 Summary

By morphing his symbiotic suit to match the soldiers, Spawn infiltrates the compound where Jason Wynn has reinforced security. He successfully severs communication and power systems to cripple the battalions, leaving a terrified Wynn trapped in silent darkness. Spawn surprises Wynn and threatens him with the promise to undermine his international operations until nothing remains of his empire. Meanwhile in the alley, Sam and Twitch try unsuccessfully to get information from the inhabitants about Spawn. Eventually, Cog fills them in on facts that only lead to more questions.



TODD MCFARLANE
PRODUCTIONS

www.spawn.com

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NEW YORK CITY.

SO WELL EXPLORED, SO WELL EXPLOITED. NO ONE HERE BELONGS HERE, REALLY, AND THEY ALL KNOW IT. THOSE OLD IMMIGRANT AREAS, WHERE THEIR GRANDPARENTS LIVED? ANYONE WITH THE MOXIE MOVES FAR FROM THERE, MAYBE A MILE OR TWO UPTOWN. LOOKING BACK IS FOR GUILTY PLEASURES... CHEAP NIGHTCLUBS, CHEAP THRILLS... AND A CURIOUS FASCINATION WITH WHAT KIND OF LIFE STILL DWELLS IN THE OLD, NARROW STREETS.

FIRST THERE WAS THE BOWERY, NEXT TO GREENWICH VILLAGE... SO CONVENIENT FOR WEEKEND SLUMMING. THEN THE NEWER TRENDY AREAS NEEDED THEIR OWN NEARBY SLUMS AND THE NAME BECAME GENERIC. SO, JUST BEYOND EVERY REDEVELOPED TRAIN STATION AND SHOPPING STRIP... WHEREVER THE MONEY RAN OUT... THERE LAY A BOWERY.

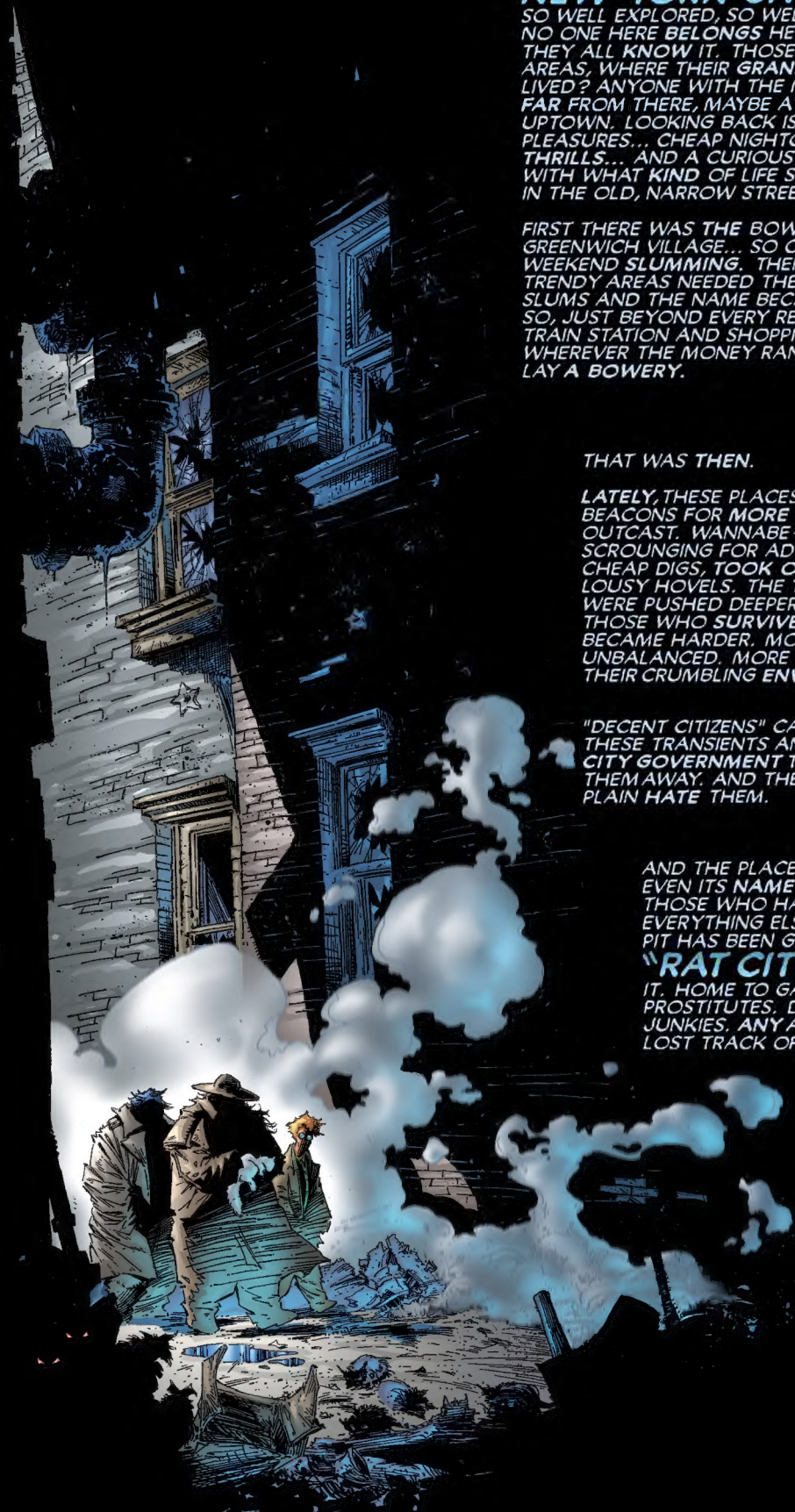
THAT WAS THEN.

LATELY, THESE PLACES HAVE BECOME BEACONS FOR MORE THAN JUST THE OUTCAST. WANNABE-TRENDIES, SCROUNGING FOR ADVENTURE AND CHEAP DIGS, TOOK OVER THE LESS-LOUSY HOVELS. THE TRULY HOPELESS WERE PUSHED DEEPER INTO THE MAZE. THOSE WHO SURVIVED THE CROWDING BECAME HARDER. MORE EMOTIONALLY UNBALANCED. MORE IN SYNC WITH THEIR CRUMBLING ENVIRONS.

"DECENT CITIZENS" CAME TO FEAR THESE TRANSIENTS AND VAGRANTS. CITY GOVERNMENT TRIES TO SWEEP THEM AWAY, AND THE POLICE JUST PLAIN HATE THEM.

AND THE PLACE ITSELF? AFTER EVEN ITS NAME WAS STOLEN BY THOSE WHO HAD STRIPPED IT OF EVERYTHING ELSE--THIS DESTITUTE PIT HAS BEEN GIVEN A NEW ONE.

"RAT CITY," THEY CALL IT. HOME TO GANGS, PIMPS AND PROSTITUTES. DRUG DEALERS AND JUNKIES. ANY AND ALL WHO HAVE LOST TRACK OF THEIR SOULS.





THE NIGHT AIR IS TURNING FRIGID AS THREE MEN ENTER THIS DARK DOMAIN. THEY STRIDE PURPOSEFULLY, HEADING DEEPER INTO SHADOWS THAT BLANKET WHAT LITTLE THEY CAN STILL SEE. IN THE LEAD IS COGLIOSTRO. HE LOOKS ALL TOO MUCH LIKE ONE OF THE DOWN-TRODDEN EXCEPT FOR THOSE EYES. THOSE EYES.

WITHIN HIS WRINKLED FACE ARE A PAIR OF COAL BLACK EYES. EYES THAT, ACCORDING TO THOSE WHO'VE LOOKED INTO THEM, GIVE THE SENSE THAT HE HAS SEEN THINGS MOST OF US COULD NEVER IMAGINE.

TONIGHT HE INTENDS TO SHARE SOME OF HIS CAREFULLY GUARDED WISDOM WITH THOSE WHO NOW ACCOMPANY HIM... THOUGH NOT QUICKLY ENOUGH TO SUIT ONE OF THEM.

"OKAY! THIS IS FAR ENOUGH, OLD MAN," BARKS THE DISHEVELED SAM BURKE. "I'M GETTING TIRED OF WALKING AROUND IN THIS DEAD QUIET WITH NO IDEA WHAT THE HELL WE'RE TRYING TO ACCOMPLISH."

BEFORE REPLYING, COGLIOSTRO TURNS TO FACE THE TWO PRIVATE DETECTIVES. HE LOCKS HIS GAZE ON BURKE. THE MOMENT IS FROZEN... THEN SAM JERKS A HAND NERVOUSLY INTO HIS SOILED TRENCHCOAT'S POCKET, RIFLING AROUND BEFORE PULLING OUT A HALF-EMPTY PACK OF CIGARETTES. BUMPING ONE OUT, HE GLANCES DOWN QUICKLY AS HE LIGHTS IT, THUS BREAKING AWAY FROM COGLIOSTRO'S STARE.

SAM'S PARTNER, 'TWITCH' WILLIAMS, STRAIGHTENS HIS TIE AND UNBUTTONS HIS COAT. HE WANTS EASY ACCESS TO HIS SHOULDER HOLSTER IF NEED BE. "I CONCUR WITH MY PARTNER. WHAT EXACTLY IS THE PURPOSE OF OUR MEETING HERE TONIGHT," TWITCH ASKS IN A LOW, PENSIVE VOICE.

"KNOWLEDGE. NOTHING ELSE WOULD HAVE ENTICED YOU HERE," COGLIOSTRO SAYS.

"LOOK! I JUST WANT TO KNOW WHY SPAWN SLUNG SOME FAT DEAD GUY IN MY OFFICE," BARKS DETECTIVE BURKE. "YOU GIVE ME THAT ANSWER AND I'LL BELIEVE WHATEVER OTHER CRAP YOU WANT ME TO."

"I ASSUME
YOU'RE
REFERRING
TO **BILLY
KINCAID**,"
SAYS
COGLIOSTRO.

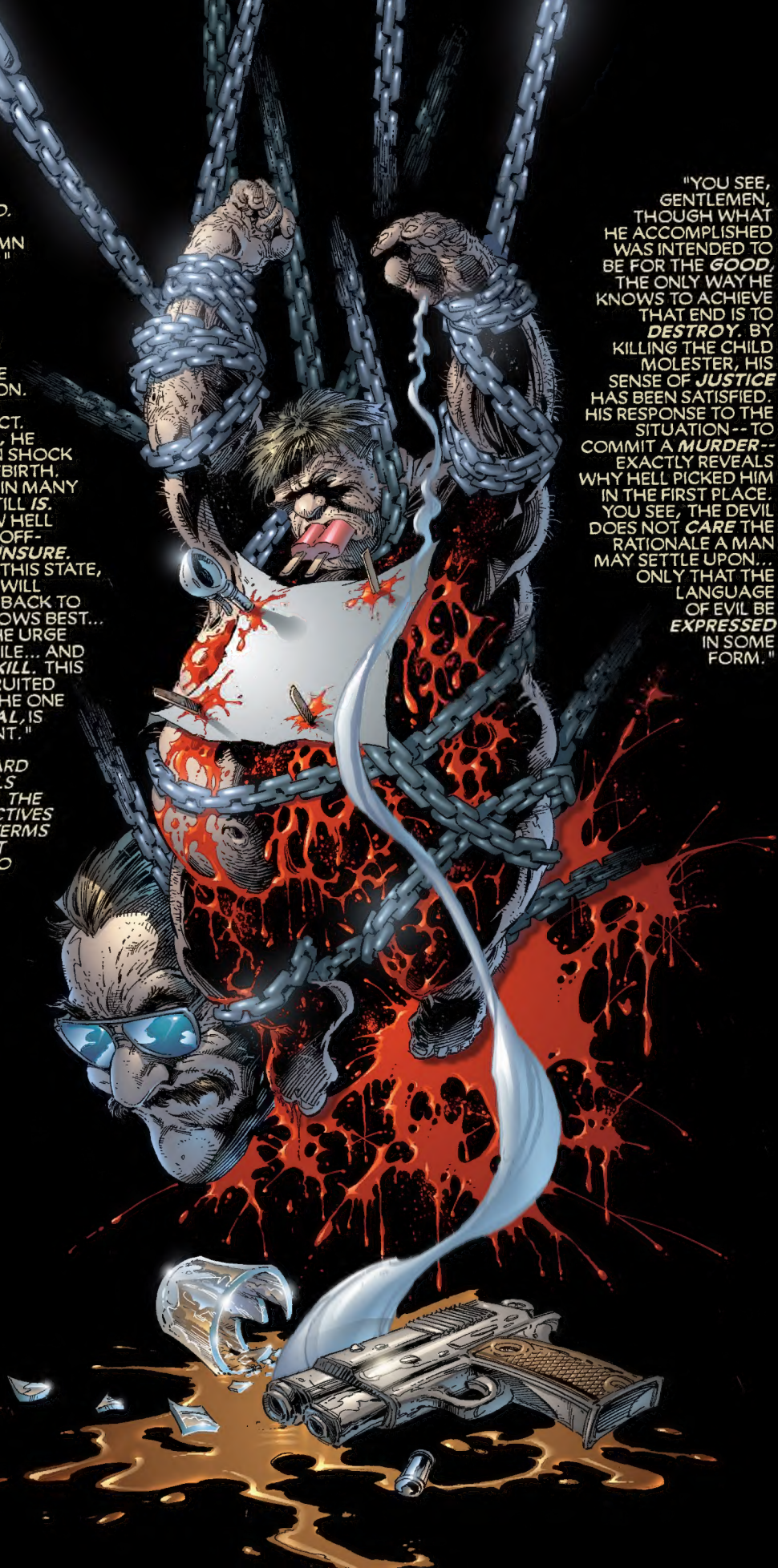
"YOU'RE DAMN
RIGHT I AM."

"AS I SAID
EARLIER,*
DETECTIVE,
SPAWN LEFT
KINCAID IN
YOUR OFFICE
FOR A REASON.
IT WASN'T A
RANDOM ACT.
AT THE TIME, HE
WAS STILL IN SHOCK
FROM HIS REBIRTH.
CONFUSED. IN MANY
WAYS, HE STILL **IS**.
THAT'S HOW HELL
NEEDS HIM. OFF-
BALANCE. **UNSURE**.
BECAUSE IN THIS STATE,
THE SPAWN WILL
ALWAYS GO BACK TO
WHAT IT KNOWS BEST...
FIGHTING THE URGE
ALL THE WHILE... AND
THAT IS TO **KILL**. THIS
NEWLY RECRUITED
WARRIOR, THE ONE
THEY CALL **AL**, IS
NO DIFFERENT."

AN AWKWARD
SILENCE FILLS
THE AIR AS THE
TWO DETECTIVES
COME TO TERMS
WITH WHAT
COGLIOSTRO
HAS JUST
SAID.

*LAST ISSUE.

"YOU SEE,
GENTLEMEN,
THOUGH WHAT
HE ACCOMPLISHED
WAS INTENDED TO
BE FOR THE **GOOD**,
THE ONLY WAY HE
KNOWS TO ACHIEVE
THAT END IS TO
DESTROY. BY
KILLING THE CHILD
MOLESTER, HIS
SENSE OF **JUSTICE**
HAS BEEN SATISFIED.
HIS RESPONSE TO THE
SITUATION -- TO
COMMIT A **MURDER** --
EXACTLY REVEALS
WHY HELL PICKED HIM
IN THE FIRST PLACE.
YOU SEE, THE DEVIL
DOES NOT **CARE** THE
RATIONALE A MAN
MAY SETTLE UPON...
ONLY THAT THE
LANGUAGE
OF EVIL BE
EXPRESSED
IN SOME
FORM."





"WHAT IN CHRIST'S NAME ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?!" BURKE SNEERS WHILE HE DRAGS ANOTHER UNFILTERED LUNGFUL. "I'M ABOUT TEN SECONDS AWAY FROM RUNNING YOUR ASS DOWNTOWN, SO LET'S YOU DROP THE PSYCHOBABBLE AND TRY TALKING LIKE A HUMAN BEING. YOU'VE GOT ANSWERS? THEN LET'S HEAR THEM. AND WITHOUT THE MELODRAMA, PUH-LEASE."

"YOUR SARCASM IS NOT NECESSARY, DETECTIVE. I MAY HAVE BEEN OBSCURE IN WHAT I WAS SAYING, AND THAT WAS NOT MY WISH. I'LL TRY AGAIN TO PAINT A PICTURE OF THE ONE YOU SO DESPERATELY SEEK. BUT BEFORE I BEGIN, BE ADVISED THAT WHAT I'M ABOUT TO TELL YOU IS THE STORY OF AN UNHOLY CURSE THAT HAS BEEN PASSED TO MANY OVER COUNTLESS GENERATIONS... PASSED MOST RECENTLY TO THIS CREATURE KNOWN ONLY AS SPAWN." PAUSING A MOMENT, COGLIOSTRO WAITS FOR DETECTIVE WILLIAMS TO READY HIMSELF WITH PEN AND NOTEPAD. HE KNOWS THAT TWITCH WON'T LET EMOTION BLUR HIS OBJECTIVITY... THAT HIS SKILLS AS AN OBSERVER ARE AS WELL-HONED AS HIS SHARPSHOOTING ABILITIES.

"UM, SIR." TWITCH INTERJECTS AS HE PUSHES HIS GLASSES UP THE BRIDGE OF HIS NOSE. "BEFORE WE START, WOULD IT BE POSSIBLE FOR YOU TO GIVE US YOUR NAME? YOU STILL HAVEN'T INTRODUCED YOURSELF."

"OF COURSE. I AM COGLIOSTRO. THOSE THAT LIVE HERE CALL ME SIMPLY 'COG'. YOU MAY DO THE SAME."

TWITCH CATCHES SAM BEFORE HE CAN SAY SOMETHING SNIDE, GIVING HIS PARTNER A LOOK THAT SAYS "LET'S JUST GIVE THIS FIVE MINUTES." SAM NODS, GRUDGINGLY. BOTH GIVE THEIR ATTENTION BACK TO THE OLD MAN.

"YOU WERE ABOUT TO SAY... COG?"

"THE MAN YOU AND YOUR FORMER FELLOW OFFICERS NOW HUNT WAS ONCE MUCH LIKE YOU. HE WAS A SOLDIER AND PRIDED HIMSELF ON HIS ROLE IN DEFENDING THIS NATION'S BORDERS. HIS NATURAL ABILITY AND YOUTHFUL ZEAL GAINED HIM QUICK ADVANCEMENT IN THE RANKS. EVENTUALLY, HE WAS ASSIGNED TO WHITE HOUSE SECURITY, AND WHILE THERE HE HELPED FOIL AN ATTEMPT ON THE PRESIDENT'S LIFE. THIS LED TO HIS ULTIMATE RECRUITMENT INTO THE U.S.S.C.*"

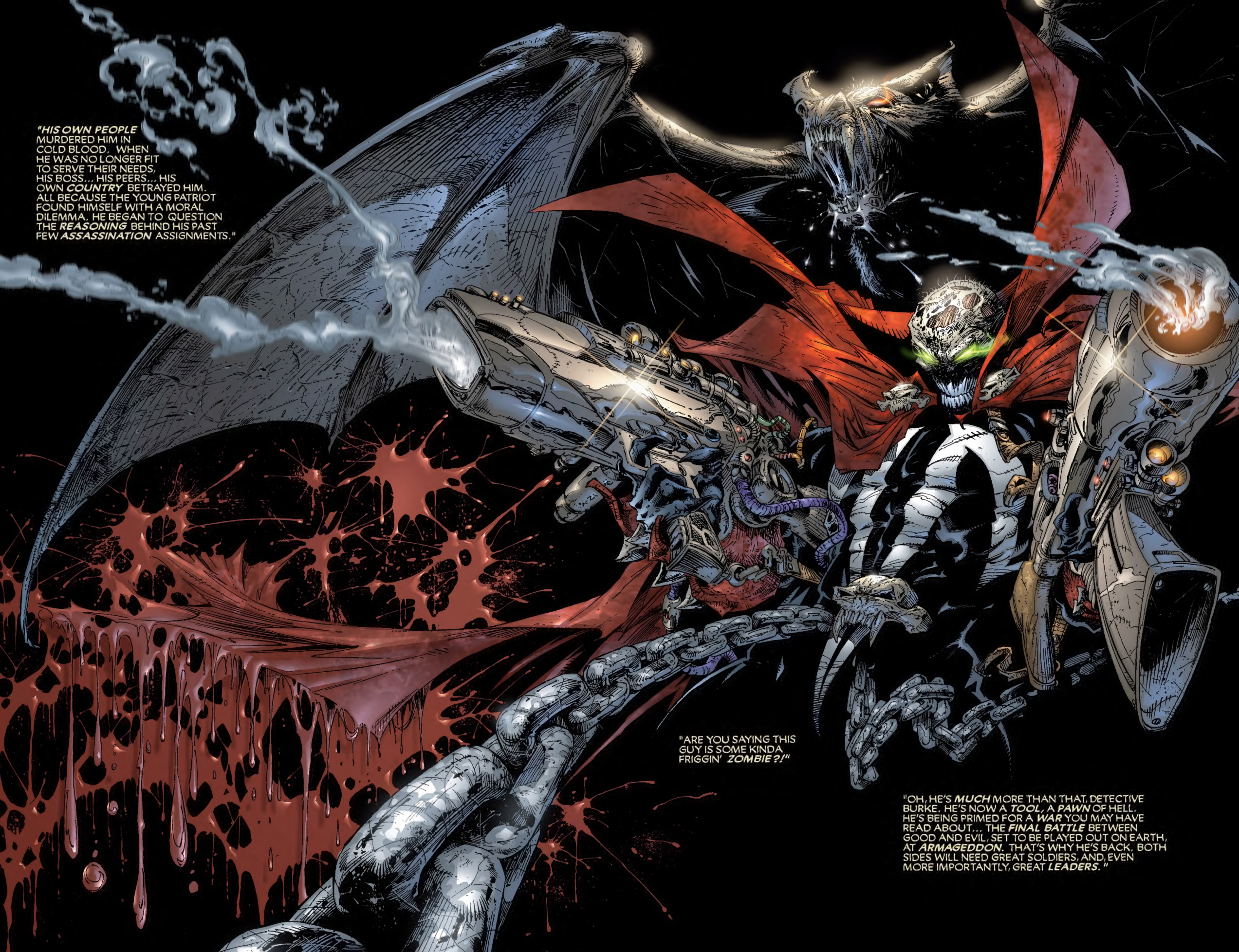
COG PAUSES A MOMENT SO SAM CAN INTERRUPT, "CRIPES! ISN'T THAT WHERE WE TRACED ALL THOSE CALLS CHIEF BANKS WAS MAKING?"

"THAT'S JUST WHAT I WAS THINKING, SIR," TWITCH REPLIES HESITANTLY.

"WHAT'S MORE," COG RESUMES, "THAT IS WHERE THEY TURNED THE SOMETIMES VIOLENT YOUNG MAN INTO AN ELITE LEVEL ASSASSIN... BEFORE THEY THEMSELVES ELIMINATED HIM."

*UNITED STATES SECURITY COUNCIL -- Tom.





"HIS OWN PEOPLE
MURDERED HIM IN
COLD BLOOD. WHEN
HE WAS NO LONGER FIT
TO SERVE THEIR NEEDS,
HIS BOSS... HIS PEERS... HIS
OWN COUNTRY BETRAYED HIM.
ALL BECAUSE THE YOUNG PATRIOT
FOUND HIMSELF WITH A MORAL
DILEMMA, HE BEGAN TO QUESTION
THE *REASONING* BEHIND HIS PAST
FEW *ASSASSINATION* ASSIGNMENTS."

"ARE YOU SAYING THIS
GUY IS SOME KINDA
FRIGGIN' ZOMBIE?!"

"OH, HE'S *MUCH* MORE THAN THAT, DETECTIVE
BURKE. HE'S NOW A *TOOL*, A *PAWN* OF HELL.
HE'S BEING PRIMED FOR A *WAR* YOU MAY HAVE
READ ABOUT... THE *FINAL BATTLE* BETWEEN
GOOD AND EVIL, SET TO BE PLAYED OUT ON EARTH,
AT *ARMAGEDDON*. THAT'S WHY HE'S BACK. BOTH
SIDES WILL NEED GREAT SOLDIERS, AND, EVEN
MORE IMPORTANTLY, GREAT *LEADERS*."



"THAT'S WHAT HE'S BECOME, AN **OFFICER-IN-TRAINING**, PLACED BACK ON EARTH TO HONE HIS ABILITIES. ONE DAY, IF HE PROVES HIS POTENTIAL, HE MAY BECOME ONE OF THE EXALTED, CHOSEN FEW... A LEADER OF THE SOULLESS HORDES OF HELL AS THEY ENGAGE GOD'S ARMIES."

COGLIOSTRO PAUSES FOR A BREATH AND TO GIVE THE MEN AN OPPORTUNITY TO **SCOFF**. THIS TIME, THOUGH, NEITHER OF THEM HAS A WORD TO SAY. PERHAPS THEY ARE BEGINNING TO **ACCEPT** HIS WORDS... OR, MORE TYPICALLY, SHEER DISBELIEF MAY HAVE TEMPERED THEIR INQUIRIES. EITHER WAY, A **SEED** HAS BEEN PLANTED.

"I SENSE APPREHENSION ON YOUR PART. I HARDLY BLAME YOU. COME... FOLLOW ME. THERE'S SOMETHING I'D LIKE FOR YOU TO **SEE**. A PIECE OF SPAWN'S WORLD THAT MIGHT MAKE ALL THIS A BIT EASIER TO ACCEPT."

WITHOUT PAUSE, COGLIOSTRO TURNS AND HEADS PURPOSEFULLY INTO THE GLOOM. CAUGHT BY SURPRISE, THE TWO DETECTIVES BUSTLE AFTER HIM, SAM PUFFING INTENSELY AND TWITCH COMPROMISING NONE OF HIS PENMANSHIP AS HE MATCHES THE PACE. WHETHER BY LUCK OR DESIGN, THEY CATCH SIGHT OF HIM A SCANT HALF-SECOND BEFORE HE ROUNDS A CORNER.

AS THE THREESOME TRAVERSE THE MAZE OF GARBAGE-RIDDEN PASSAGEWAYS, AN ODD SENSATION COMES TO BURKE. SOMETHING IS WRONG. BASED ON EVERY PIECE OF INTELLIGENCE HE'S GATHERED ON SPAWN, THIS IS NOT WHERE THE CLOAKED ENIGMA HAS BEEN SIGHTED. THE CONSENSUS OF THE POLICE PUTS HIS DIGS CLOSER TO 78TH STREET, NOT IN THIS VICINITY. SO WHERE'S THE OLD MAN TAKING THEM? INTO SOME KIND OF SET-UP, A TRAP?

STILL, HE AND HIS PARTNER FOLLOW COG INTO THE INKY UNKNOWN.

TURN AFTER TURN THEY MAKE UNTIL IT SEEMS THEY'VE GONE IN CIRCLES.

SUDDENLY, COG STOPS SHORT. "HAVE A LOOK AT WHAT IS NOW A NORMAL PART OF HIS EXISTENCE." HE GESTURES, HIS RIGHT ARM POINTING DOWN A SMALL ALLEYWAY NO WIDER THAN FOUR FEET ACROSS. AS IT DEAD-ENDS, THERE BECOMES APPARENT ONE LAST RIGHT-HAND JOG.

SAM TAKES THE POINT. IT'S A FEW SECONDS BEFORE THEIR EYES ADJUST TO THE BAREST OF INDIRECT LIGHT. THEN...

THEY TAKE IN...

A SIGHT NEITHER
MAN WILL SOON
FORGET.



A BARELY AUDIBLE WHISPER ESCAPES
DETECTIVE WILLIAMS' LIPS: "DEAR GOD...!"

THE CONSTRUCT IS A TWISTED MASS OF
RUBBISH. SPLINTERED WOOD, BENT,
RUSTED PIPE, MOLDY GARBAGE SO RIPE
THAT THE LIQUIFIED POOLS HAVE JELLED.
PIECES OF ALMOST ANY LITTLE THING...

...CLOTHING... BOTTLES... SYRINGES...
NEWSPAPER... CHICKENWIRE...

...ALL WOVEN INTO A SPECIFIC FORM,
BUT THE COMPONENT PART THAT
DRAWS THE DETECTIVES' ATTENTION
IS THE HUMAN REMAINS. SOME
ARE STILL FLESHY, SOME HEAVILY
DECOMPOSED, ALL ARE CRAWLING
WITH MAGGOTS...

THOUSANDS OF MAGGOTS...

...GIVING THE ILLUSION THAT THE
ENTIRE FRAMEWORK IS ALIVE...
ALIVE AND SOLID... HOLDING THE
SHAPE OF ITS OWN FREE WILL.

THEREFORE, THE THOUGHT OF
WHAT IT APPEARS TO BE BECOMES
EVEN MORE REPELLANT.

"JEEZ-US! IT'S SOME KINDA
FRIGGIN' CHAIR!" BELLOWS SAM.

"A THRONE, TO BE MORE EXACT,"
SUGGESTS COG.



"THE HOMELESS
REVERE THIS NEW
WARRIOR. THEY
HAVE TAKEN IT
UPON THEMSELVES
TO BUILD A SEAT
OF **PROMINENCE**
FOR THEIR ANOINTED
KING.

"THE REMNANTS OF
HUMAN SKELETONS ARE
THOSE OF **GANGSTERS**
OR **DRUG PEDDLERS**.
SPAWN DID NOT END
THEIR LIVES. **THAT** THEY
DID TO **THEMSELVES**.

"YOU SEE, THESE
ALLEYS ARE A
REPOSITORY FOR
MAN'S **EVIL DEEDS**.
DEPRIVED OF GOD'S
LIGHT AS THEY ARE,
THEY MAKE AN
EXCELLENT DUMP SITE
FOR **MURDER VICTIMS**.
SPAWN HAS COLLECTED
SOME OF THEM TO
REMINDE HIMSELF OF
THE **MADNESS** HE
NOW CALLS **HOME**.

"NOW, BEFORE
YOU PASS
JUDGMENT,"
EXPLAINS **COG**,
"CONSIDER HIS
CIRCUMSTANCES.
THIS IS A MAN
WHO HAS LOST
EVERYTHING
HE HELD DEAR.
ONE PERSON
ESPECIALLY
GAVE MEANING
TO HIS LIFE, AND
THAT WAS THE
WOMAN HE'D
MARRIED.

"HELL KNEW
THIS WHEN IT
CHOSE HIM.
SHE WAS HIS
ACHILLES'
HEEL.

"**LOVE**, AFTER
ALL, HAS **AL-**
WAYS BEEN
MANKIND'S
GREATEST
STRENGTH...
AND MOST
DAMNING
WEAKNESS."





"AT THE TIME OF HIS DEATH, AL HEARD A VOICE WHICH CLAIMED IT WAS WILLING TO HELP. AL ASKED FOR ONE LAST CHANCE TO SEE HIS WIFE.

"THAT WISH... HIS LOVE... SEALED HIS FATE. THE VOICE SPOKE TO HIM FROM A **BLACK VOID**, AND AL COULDN'T SEE A FACE. IN HIS DESPAIR, HE ASSUMED IT WAS THE VOICE OF GOD. IT WAS NOT. RATHER, IT WAS ONE OF HELL'S **DEVILS**, TRICKING THE YOUNG MAN. AL WAS GRANTED HIS REQUEST, BUT AT THE COST OF A FLOOD OF PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL **TORTURES** MEANT TO DEMORALIZE HIS SPIRIT.

"THOUGH, AS HE RECKONED TIME, HE'D BEEN KILLED ONLY A MOMENT EARLIER, **FIVE LONG YEARS** HAD PASSED AMONG THE LIVING. TIME **ITSELF** HAD BECOME A TORMENTER. HIS **WIFE** WAS NOW REMARRIED, TO AL'S **BEST FRIEND**... A MAN CAPABLE OF GIVING HER A CHILD, **A CHILD!** A MIRACLE SHE'D LONG THOUGHT **IMPOSSIBLE**. FOR A MAN AS **VITAL** AS AL HAD BEEN, THIS WAS A THOUGHT HE WOULD NOT EVEN CONSIDER... THAT THE CHILDLESS MARRIAGE WAS DUE TO A FAILURE ALL HIS **OWN**.

"THERE WAS ONE OTHER INDIGNITY. WITH FIVE YEARS GONE BY SINCE HIS BURIAL, HIS **OWN** FAMILY, WHEN THEY THOUGHT OF HIM AT ALL, DID SO WITH ONLY PASSING FONDNESS."



"ADDING TO HIS ANGUISH WAS HIS **APPEARANCE**. HE RETURNED LOOKING AS HE HAD AT THE TIME OF HIS DEATH... AS A CHARRED **CORPSE**, THE FLESH NEARLY FLAYED AWAY BY A HIGH-POWERED BLOWTORCH.

"TRY TO IMAGINE HOW YOU'D FEEL WITH YOUR **IDENTITY** STRIPPED AWAY... YOUR **HUMANITY LOST**... TO FIND THAT THE PERSON FOR WHOM YOU RETURNED, THE ONE YOU DEARLY **LOVE**, TO BE NOT ONLY **UNAWARE** OF YOUR IDENTITY BUT REPELLED BY THAT WHICH YOU'VE **BECOME!** INSANITY WOULD NOT THEN SEEM SO FAR AWAY, DON'T YOU AGREE?"

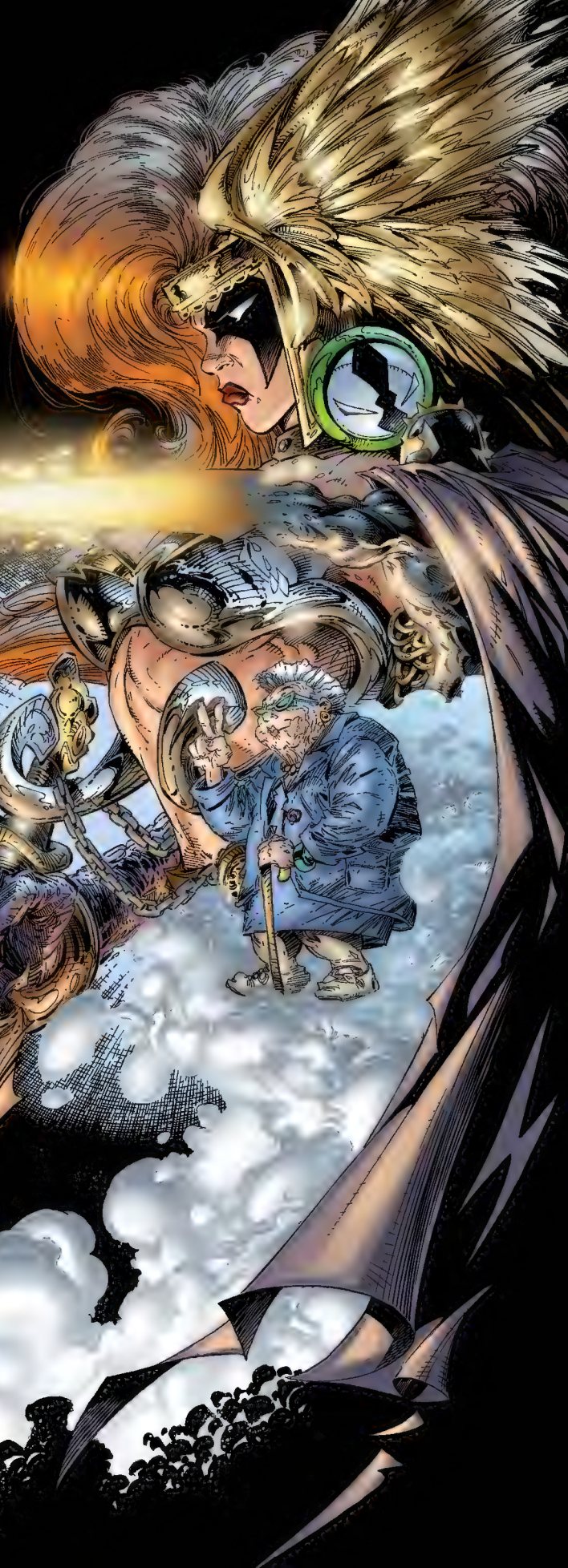
"OH YES-- THE CHARRED SKIN IS NOT THE **END** OF IT. HELL HAS PROVIDED NEW SKIN OF ITS **OWN**, A **SUIT** OF LIVING TISSUE WHICH ACTS BOTH AS PROTECTOR AND UNIFORM TO ITS HOST."

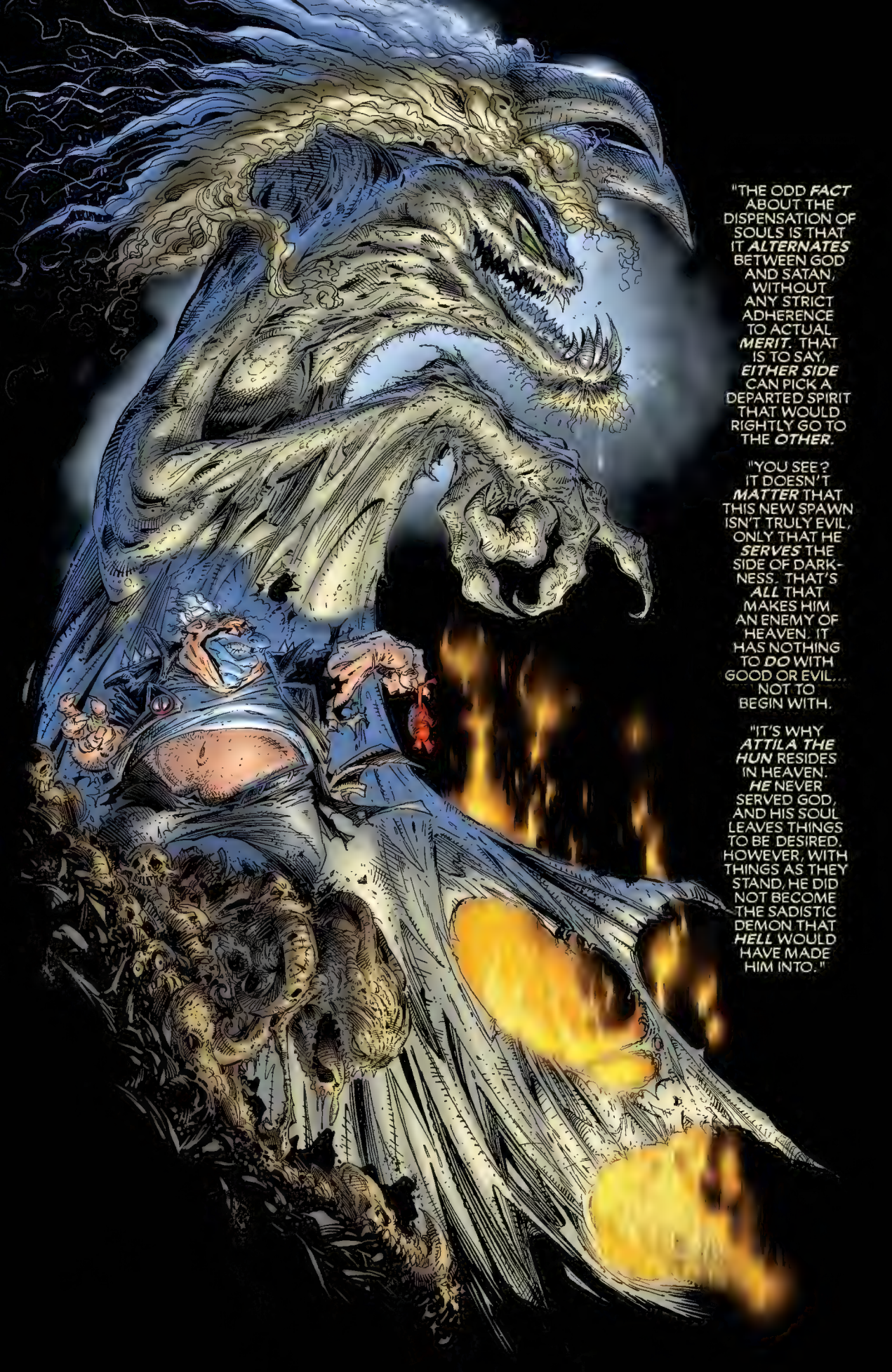
"HIS METAMORPHOSIS COMPLETE, THIS NEW RECRUIT MUST NOW ADAPT TO SURVIVE AND *THRIVE* IN THE AGE-OLD GAME BETWEEN HEAVEN AND HELL. RAISING THE STAKES ARE HIS *OH-SO*-SLOWLY DEVELOPING SENSE OF HIS OWN INVOLVEMENT... AND THE INCOMPREHENSIBLE CONSEQUENCES FOR HIM SHOULD HE *FAIL*, THE WORST BEING FORFEITURE OF HIS *SOUL*."

LOOKING UP FROM HIS PAD FOR THE FIRST TIME, TWITCH ASKS TENTATIVELY, "ARE WE TO BELIEVE THIS SPAWN IS SOME TYPE OF *PARANORMAL*?"

"*NO*," COG ANSWERS FIRMLY. "HIS TYPE ARE ORDINARY AMONG THEMSELVES... AND MORE COMMON AMONG US THAN YOU MAY THINK." HE PAUSES FOR EFFECT. LOOKING UP, TWITCH OBSERVES... WHAT? A TRICK OF THE LIGHT? A SMIRK?

COG CONTINUES: "WHAT HE'S *BECOME*, AS I SAY, IS A *TOOL*, FORGED FROM THE SUBSTANCE OF WHICH ALL HELL'S EARTHLY CHILDREN ARE MADE, CALLED *NECROPLASM*. THIS INFERNAL MATTER MAKES HIM A CONSPICUOUS TARGET FOR *HEAVEN'S* AGENTS. OH YES, GOD'S WARRIORS AND HUNTERS ARE AMONG US TOO, STATIONED HERE WITH A PURPOSE. BY GOD'S LIGHT EACH HELLSPAWN, FOR THE FACT OF ITS EXISTENCE, IS CONDEMNED TO *DEATH BY DECAPITATION*."






"THE ODD FACT ABOUT THE DISPENSATION OF SOULS IS THAT IT **ALTERNATES** BETWEEN GOD AND SATAN, WITHOUT ANY STRICT ADHERENCE TO ACTUAL **MERIT**. THAT IS TO SAY, **EITHER SIDE** CAN PICK A DEPARTED SPIRIT THAT WOULD RIGHTLY GO TO THE **OTHER**.

"YOU SEE? IT DOESN'T **MATTER** THAT THIS NEW SPAWN ISN'T TRULY EVIL, ONLY THAT HE **SERVES** THE SIDE OF DARKNESS. THAT'S **ALL** THAT MAKES HIM AN ENEMY OF HEAVEN. IT HAS NOTHING TO **DO** WITH GOOD OR EVIL... NOT TO BEGIN WITH.

"IT'S WHY **ATTILA THE HUN** RESIDES IN HEAVEN. **HE** NEVER SERVED GOD, AND HIS SOUL LEAVES THINGS TO BE DESIRED. HOWEVER, WITH THINGS AS THEY STAND, HE DID NOT BECOME THE SADISTIC DEMON THAT **HELL** WOULD HAVE MADE HIM INTO."

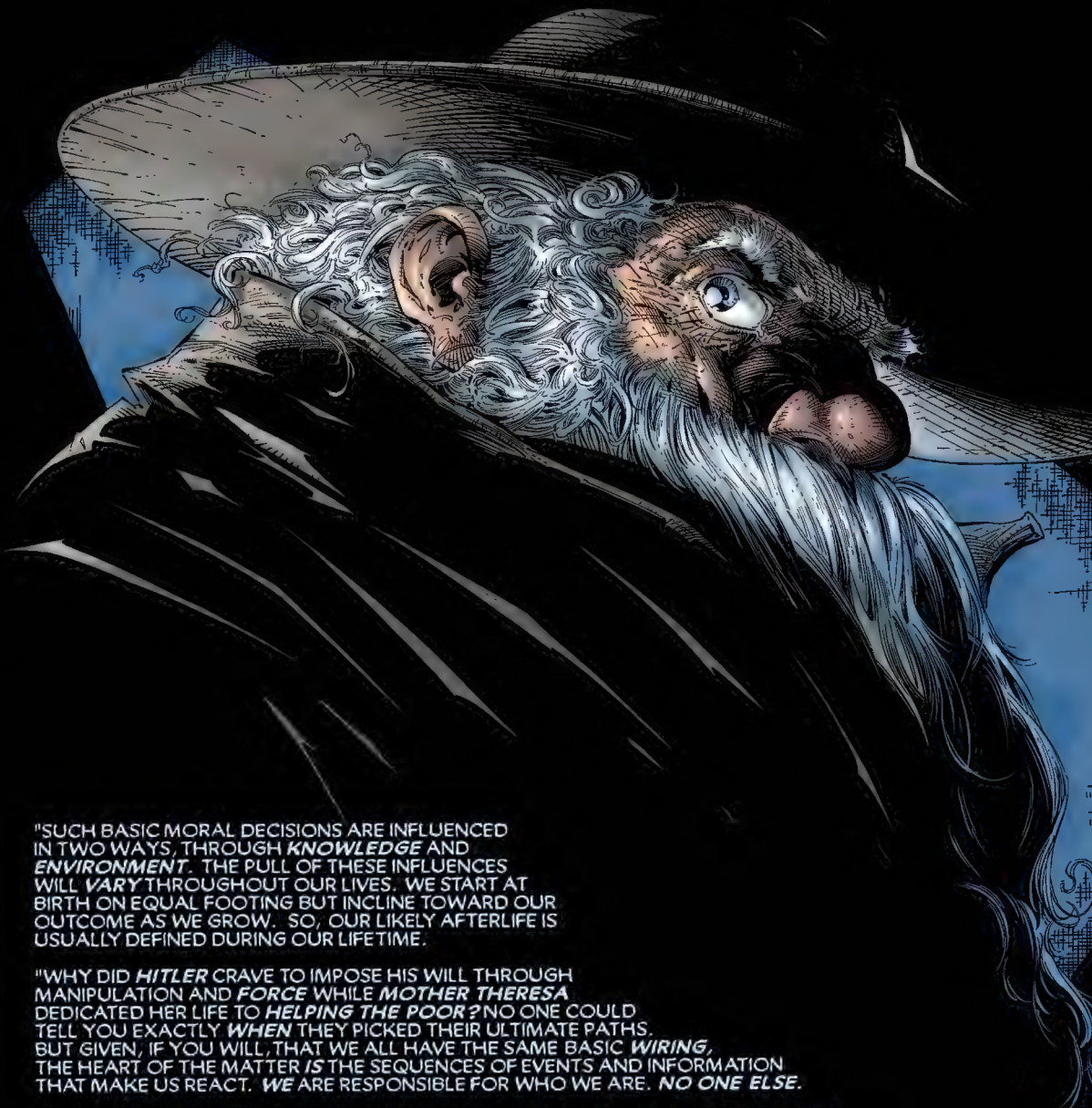
A complex collage of comic book characters. At the top right is Sam, a man with a wide-brimmed hat and a long beard. Below him is Cog, a character with a large, red, bird-like head and glowing yellow eyes. In the center is a character in a green and silver suit with a helmet. To the left is a character with a large, white, feathered head. At the bottom is a character with a large, blue, reptilian head and glowing red eyes. The background is a dark, swirling blue and black pattern.

SAM FLICKS HIS CIGARETTE TO THE GROUND, CRUSHES THE BUTT OUT UNDERFOOT THEN RUBS HIS FOREHEAD. THE OVERWEIGHT DETECTIVE TRIES TO FORMULATE HIS NEXT QUESTION WITHOUT SOUNDING BEGUILDED.

"SO HEAVEN AND HELL ARE HAVING SOME KIND OF *DRAFT PICK* WITH OUR SOULS. AND WHETHER WE'RE NAUGHTY OR NICE HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH ANYTHING? NOW *THAT'S* A CHEERY THOUGHT."

"YOU'RE NOT LISTENING, DETECTIVE," COG ASSERTS SCORNFULLY. "WHAT I'M SAYING IS THAT EACH ONE OF US, EVERY PERSON WHO EVER LIVED, IS CAPABLE OF *EXTREME* GOOD OR EXTREME EVIL."

"IT'S THE CHOICES WE MAKE THAT DETERMINE WHO WE ARE."



"SUCH BASIC MORAL DECISIONS ARE INFLUENCED IN TWO WAYS, THROUGH **KNOWLEDGE** AND **ENVIRONMENT**. THE PULL OF THESE INFLUENCES WILL **VARY** THROUGHOUT OUR LIVES. WE START AT BIRTH ON EQUAL FOOTING BUT INCLINE TOWARD OUR OUTCOME AS WE GROW. SO, OUR LIKELY AFTERLIFE IS USUALLY DEFINED DURING OUR LIFE TIME.

"WHY DID **HITLER** CRAVE TO IMPOSE HIS WILL THROUGH MANIPULATION AND **FORCE** WHILE **MOTHER THERESA** DEDICATED HER LIFE TO **HELPING THE POOR**? NO ONE COULD TELL YOU EXACTLY **WHEN** THEY PICKED THEIR ULTIMATE PATHS. BUT GIVEN, IF YOU WILL, THAT WE ALL HAVE THE SAME BASIC **WIRING**, THE HEART OF THE MATTER IS THE SEQUENCES OF EVENTS AND INFORMATION THAT MAKE US REACT. **WE** ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR WHO WE ARE. **NO ONE ELSE**.

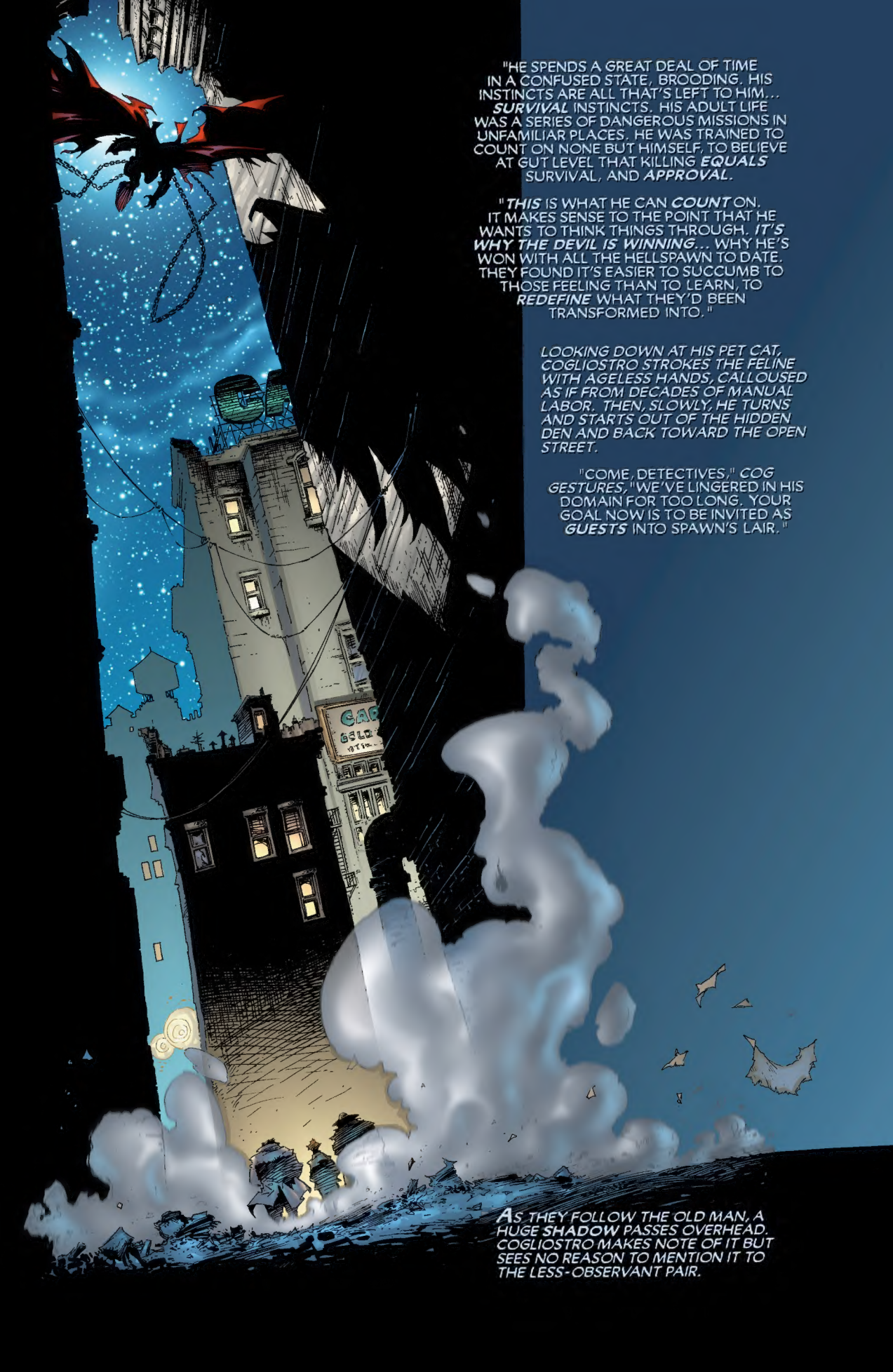
"THAT'S WHY HELL SELECTED **THIS** NEW SPAWN. AL HAD SHOWN A WIDE RANGE OF DEFINING POINTS. PATRIOT. KILLER. LOVER. ASSASSIN. **ALL** THESE THINGS HE COMMITTED HIMSELF TO, SELFLESSLY AND **WELL**, WHICH MADE HIM ATTRACTIVE TO **BOTH** SIDES.

"**SO**. HE HAS **RETURNED**. THROWN INTO THE FRYING PAN. HOW HE REACTS THIS TIME WILL HOLD **TREMENDOUS** SWAY OVER THE FINAL RESTING PLACE OF HIS SOUL.

"RIGHT NOW HE'S **FAR** FROM WINNING THE BATTLE, GENTLE MEN. EACH TIME HE GAINS A MOMENT'S **RESPITE**, ANOTHER GAUNTLET IS THROWN **BEFORE** HIM. WHEN HE ISN'T TRYING TO AVOID FORCES OF **BIBLICAL** PROPORTIONS HE'S COMING INTO CONTACT WITH ABOMINATIONS OF **FLESH AND BLOOD**...

"... 'SUPER-VILLAINS,' THEY'VE BEEN CALLED...

"... AND THEIR EFFECT HAS BEEN TO HELP UNBALANCE AL'S **ALREADY** UNSTABLE STATE OF MIND."



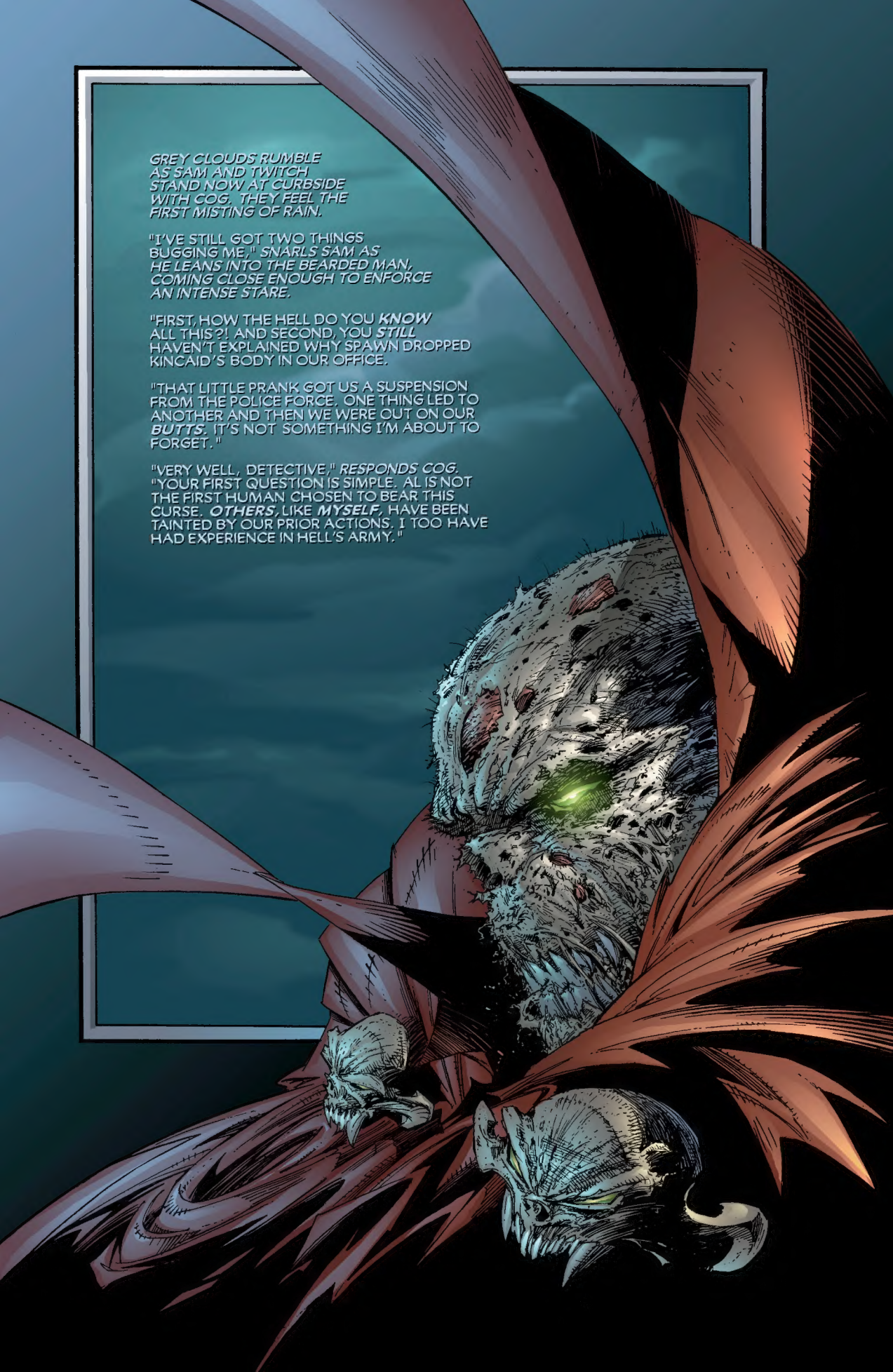
"HE SPENDS A GREAT DEAL OF TIME IN A CONFUSED STATE, BROODING. HIS INSTINCTS ARE ALL THAT'S LEFT TO HIM... **SURVIVAL** INSTINCTS. HIS ADULT LIFE WAS A SERIES OF DANGEROUS MISSIONS IN UNFAMILIAR PLACES. HE WAS TRAINED TO COUNT ON NONE BUT HIMSELF, TO BELIEVE AT GUT LEVEL THAT KILLING **EQUALS** SURVIVAL, AND **APPROVAL**.

"**THIS** IS WHAT HE CAN **COUNT** ON. IT MAKES SENSE TO THE POINT THAT HE WANTS TO THINK THINGS THROUGH. **IT'S WHY THE DEVIL IS WINNING...** WHY HE'S WON WITH ALL THE HELLSPAWN TO DATE. THEY FOUND IT'S EASIER TO SUCCUMB TO THOSE FEELING THAN TO LEARN, TO **REDEFINE** WHAT THEY'D BEEN TRANSFORMED INTO."

LOOKING DOWN AT HIS PET CAT, **COGLIOSTRO** STROKES THE FELINE WITH AGELESS HANDS, CALLOUSED AS IF FROM DECADES OF MANUAL LABOR. THEN, SLOWLY, HE TURNS AND STARTS OUT OF THE HIDDEN DEN AND BACK TOWARD THE OPEN STREET.

"COME, DETECTIVES," **COG** GESTURES, "WE'VE LINGERED IN HIS DOMAIN FOR TOO LONG. YOUR GOAL NOW IS TO BE INVITED AS **GUESTS** INTO SPAWN'S LAIR."

AS THEY FOLLOW THE OLD MAN, A HUGE SHADOW PASSES OVERHEAD. **COGLIOSTRO** MAKES NOTE OF IT BUT SEES NO REASON TO MENTION IT TO THE LESS-OBSERVANT PAIR.



GREY CLOUDS RUMBLE
AS SAM AND TWITCH
STAND NOW AT CURBSIDE
WITH COG. THEY FEEL THE
FIRST MISTING OF RAIN.

"I'VE STILL GOT TWO THINGS
BUGGING ME," SNARLS SAM AS
HE LEANS INTO THE BEARDED MAN,
COMING CLOSE ENOUGH TO ENFORCE
AN INTENSE STARE.

"FIRST, HOW THE HELL DO YOU *KNOW*
ALL THIS?! AND SECOND, YOU *STILL*
HAVEN'T EXPLAINED WHY SPAWN DROPPED
KINCAID'S BODY IN OUR OFFICE.

"THAT LITTLE PRANK GOT US A SUSPENSION
FROM THE POLICE FORCE. ONE THING LED TO
ANOTHER AND THEN WE WERE OUT ON OUR
BUTTS. IT'S NOT SOMETHING I'M ABOUT TO
FORGET."

"VERY WELL, DETECTIVE," RESPONDS COG.
"YOUR FIRST QUESTION IS SIMPLE. AL IS NOT
THE FIRST HUMAN CHOSEN TO BEAR THIS
CURSE. *OTHERS*, LIKE *MYSELF*, HAVE BEEN
TAINTED BY OUR PRIOR ACTIONS. I TOO HAVE
HAD EXPERIENCE IN HELL'S ARMY."

"THE ANSWER TO YOUR SECOND QUESTION IS SOMETHING YOU MAY NOT WISH TO HEAR.

"EVERY KING NEEDS THE HELP OF LOYAL KNIGHTS. WHEN EACH NEW HELLSPAWN APPEARS BACK ON EARTH, THEY SEEK OUT THOSE WHO MAY HELP THEM IN *THEIR* QUEST TO RECAPTURE THEIR LOST *HUMANITY*.

"HE HAS CHOSEN THE TWO OF YOU. THE BLOODY BODY OF BILLY KINCAID ESTABLISHED A *BOND* BETWEEN YOU... A DEATH FOREVER *TYING* EACH OF YOU TO THE OTHER.

"I SHOULD SAY AS WELL THAT SPAWN HIMSELF IS *UNAWARE* THAT HE'S PICKED YOU. HE WAS ACTING ON AN INSTINCTIVE LEVEL. REGARDLESS, YOU'VE BEEN MADE PARTNERS IN HIS CURSE. THIS HELL-SPAWN YOU SET OUT TO HUNT IS IN REALITY YOUR NEW *MASTER*.

"YOU ARE TO *HELP* HIM METE OUT *JUSTICE*."

NEARBY, THE KING IS AGAIN IN PLACE IN HIS SANCTUARY. FRESH BLOOD STAINS HIS HANDS...





Tyrant
Lizard
King

EMPIRE